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January 2, 2007

To Members of the Committee on Energy and Commerce:

We are pleased to forward to you the bipartisan report prepared by Committee staff entitled "Sexual Exploitation of Children Over the Internet." This report summarizes what was learned during a one-year investigation by the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

During nine days of public hearings, the Subcommittee found that the sexual exploitation of children over the Internet has reached a crisis point. Current estimates indicate that, at any given time, approximately 50,000 child predators are online searching for children. Commercial child pornography websites are increasing in number and may generate billions of dollars a year in revenue. To date, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's ("NCMEC") Child Victim Identification Program ("CVIP") has reviewed to date over six million individual images related to apparent child pornography.

Even more disturbing is the fact that the images now being found on the Internet are becoming more violent in nature, including depictions of rape and torture, and the children abused in these images are younger and younger. According to NCMEC, more than 80 percent of the images found on the computers of those individuals caught with images of child sexual abuse include children who are 12-years-old or younger. Thirty-nine percent of those persons caught with images of child sexual abuse possessed images of children younger than six-years-old and 19 percent of those persons arrested on child pornography charges between July 2000 and June 2001 possessed images of children younger than three-years-old. While law enforcement is making great strides, additional resources must be dedicated to combating this problem, including the resources of the Internet Service Providers and financial services companies, as well as other firms whose systems have been exploited by child predators and commercial child pornography businesses.

Already, the Subcommittee's investigation has resulted in some important changes in the way the United States government and the private sector are combating the sexual exploitation of children over the Internet. These changes, which are described more fully in the text of the report, include the voluntary agreement of some Internet Service Providers to increase their data retention policies; the creation of the Technology and Financial Services Coalitions at NCMEC; increased cooperation internationally among law enforcement agencies; the growing consensus that legislation may be necessary to aid law enforcement investigations of Internet child pornography; and passage in the House of Representatives of a provision that places certain network providers at risk if they fail to prevent the distribution of child pornography over their systems. We expect that this investigation will lead to additional reforms aimed at identifying child predators and preventing the transmission of child pornography images over the Internet.

Respectfully submitted,

Ed Whitfield
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations

Bart Stupak
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight
and Investigations